A DAUGHTER OF THE REDS

Raphael Decroix

By MAX PEMBERTON

IT was said, in course of the siege of Paris, that the Germans knew more of events in the city than the Frenchmen themselves. That history has justified this somewhat large claim there now seems to be no doubt. Not merely by isolated and daring spies were these ends achieved. An organized system of intelligence carried out by officers, often of distinction, helped the great Moltke to his astounding acquaintance with the secrets of Paris, when she thought to hide them from the world. The following story is only an instance of many that could be told. It is, however, remarkable among them for the very audacity which it reveals.

Implored Her to Come to a House Where a Young Soldier Lay Dying

Dolores Morizon, an aristocrat of aristocrats before the war, was one of the few French noblewomen who remained in Paris during the siege, devoting her money and her energies to the relief of suffering when she found it. Established in her little house in the Rue des Irlandais, she went out daily to minister to the wounded in the churches and the hospitals, to carry luxuries to the poor, and to show, above all, that example of rare courage and self-sacrifice which are among the few honest lessons war has to teach. The people naturally idolized this brave and charming girl; nor did they hesitate to summon her to their houses whenever trouble fell upon them.

Grown accustomed to this sisterhood of charity, it was no surprise to Dolores to be accosted, late one afternoon in January, 187-, as she was leaving the church of Ste. Geneviève, by a young girl, apparently no more than fifteen or sixteen years of age, who implored her for the love of God to come to a house in the Rue de Seine, where a young soldier lay dying of his wounds.

Exceedingly pretty and frank and ingenuous, the girl's distress earned a sympathetic answer, and Dolores accompanied the child down the Boulevard St. Michel, and, thence turned into the famous Faubourg St.-Germain.

They had walked perhaps a hundred yards down this fine thoroughfare when, stopping without warning before the wicket-gate of one of the finest houses on the faubourg, the girl knocked twice upon it, and was answered instantly from within.

"It is here, mademoiselle," she said eagerly. "My brother is here. Our father was the concierge, you know. How good it is of you to take pity upon us! Oh mademoiselle, please be quick, for he is dying!"

It had been so cleverly done, so quick and well planned, that Dolores found herself within the courtyard of the great house before the smallest suspicion troubled her. If she remembered that the child had spoken of the Rue de Seine, a second thought reminded her that this mansion stood almost at the corner of that thoroughfare, and such a manner of speaking would be natural enough.

Then the story that the wounded man was the son of the concierge entirely deceived her. The house itself, she remembered, had belonged to the Italian flâneur Count Brachelli, who had fled from the city, as so many others, before the siege began. But chiefly, perhaps, the young girl's distressing anxiety to return to her brother's side and the gratitude she expressed so frequently reassured Dolores.

Convinced that she had come upon a real mission of charity, she passed through the outer courtyard and entered the hall of the mansion. A moment later the bronze doors clanged behind her, and she understood that she had fallen into a trap, and that her liberty certainly, her life perhaps, might be the price of her confidence.

How, then, was this discovery made? The answer to that question is found in one of those accidents into which the most cunning of men are betrayed when custom has schooled them to deride the peril of their calling.

It had been dusk when Dolores left the church of Ste. Geneviève. Here, in the hall of Count Brachelli's house—that superb hall to which so many treasures had been carried from Italy and Spain and the East—here black darkness reigned except for such a ray of light as a door ajar cast out upon the marble pavement.

Quick as the hand was which shut the door when the bronze gates clanged, it had not been so quick that Dolores' clever eye did not apprehend the truth. For the light revealed to her astonished eyes the corner of a mahogany table, and upon that table there lay a porcelain pipe that could have been made only in Nuremberg.

A pipe lying upon a mahogany table! Nothing, it may be said, alarming about that. And yet as in a flash this clever woman reckoned up the chances and guessed the truth. The pipe, it is true, might have belonged to one of Count Brachelli's servants. But then the girl had said that these were gone with their master. And had she not declared that the concierge himself was a Frenchman and her father?

If these facts awakened suspicion, the voice which bade some one shut the door confirmed it almost beyond question. Undoubtedly the speaker used the German tongue. He was answered in the same language, not by one obeying a request, but a military command. Of this Dolores, a soldier's sister, had no doubt whatever. And it terrified her, it may be, more than any word she had heard in all her life.

Many swift ideas came to this brave woman as she stood alone in the great hall and waited for the young girl to reappear with a light. Should she confront these people at once, letting them know what she heard, or should she keep her secret and await developments? The latter course appeared to her the wiser one. After all, they might make no attempt to detain her; and if a case of true sickness was in the house, compassion had dictated their summons to her.

Arguing in this way, she had recovered her habitual composure when the girl returned, carrying a small lamp in her hand; and she followed her up the great staircase without remark. The fact that she should be conducted thus, straight to the sick man's bed-room, seemed a guaranty at least of a certain honesty; and the presence of another of her own sex helped her reassurance.

"This way, mademoiselle, if you please. Captain Collingwood is with my brother now."

She was not a good actress, this chit with the pathetic tongue; and when she uttered the name Captain Collingwood a light laugh escaped her lips, though she smothered it instantly. The bed-room itself had been one of the absent Count's favorite guest-rooms. Walls, ceiling, furniture, all spoke of a catholic taste and a lavish outlay of money. Its window looked away to the southwest of Paris, toward Versailles and the temporary home of the detested Bismarck.

There were two men within the room: one pale and wounded and ghastly, sleeping in the splendid bed; the other, a soldier, with flaxen hair and a short beard, watching by the window for any omens the view might show him. This man turned swiftly upon his heel when Dolores entered, and bowing to her, offered his excuses.

"Mademoiselle Morizon, a thousand apologies for this liberty!"

"One will be sufficient, Captain Collingwood, when I am acquainted with its nature."

Her calmness perplexed him not a little, for he had expected an angry outburst; and evidently he was lost for an answer. "The excuse is there!" he exclaimed at length, pointing to the bed whereon the sick man lay. "Our friend has met with an accident, and, to be frank, we cannot send for a doctor, mademoiselle."

"You cannnot send for a doctor?"

"Precisely as I say. We cannot send for a doctor, mademoiselle, for our friend has old Bismarck's commission in his pocket."

She shrugged her shoulders, and turned away from him a little impatiently. "Are you an Englishman?" she asked abruptly. "Your name is English, is it not?"

"I married an English wife, mademoiselle, and to be frank, her name sounds well in Paris."

"Then you also, Captain, are unable to send for a doctor?"

He laughed loudly, almost vulgarly, at her rejoinder, and instantly assumed an air of some familiarity. "I see that you are sensible," he said —"as sensible as your heart is kind. Here is a poor young fellow who had the misfortune to run into a French bullet as he was crossing the River Marne. Very well. We choose an apartment for him in Paris—the best, mademoiselle, for that is our habit. Our own surgeon visits him, until he, another poor fellow of the same kind, is murdered by your people at the doors of the Café Strasburg. So we are left without medical aid. Your French doctors do not understand us, mademoiselle. Their physic is not to our liking—they would as soon kill as cure us. We come to the conclusion that it is wiser to have nothing to do with them, and so we send for a very gracious lady, worth many doctors, and always willing to do an act of charity. Is it necessary for me to say more? Honesty is the best policy. That is what my poor wife tells me when I endeavor to explain compromising circumstances to her. You will be wiser than she is—"

"But scarcely more unfortunate, Captain."

She turned away disdainfully, and bent over the sick man, whose restless movements and flushed cheeks spoke of fever following upon his wounds.

Pity forbade her to withhold such assistance as she could give to this puny victim of a nation's quarrel; and moreover, since sympathy so largely dictates a woman's acts, she liked the appearance of the lad and pitied his condition. For the Captain, however, his boasts and his familiar patronage she had nothing but contempt, and this she made no attempt to disguise.

"Understand," she said curtly, "my presence here does not answer for my silence. I am a Frenchwoman, and pity is less to me than my country's honor. When I leave this house it will be my duty to make the circumstances of its occupation known to those they concern. No doubt you have considered all that before you sent for me, Captain."

"My dear lady," he rejoined, with malice so delicate that the intonation hardly betrayed him—